

Aging as a global health issue

Advances in hygiene and medicine during the 20th century have led to a decline in mortality, accompanied by a transformation of the causes of death, with infectious diseases gradually being replaced by chronic and degenerative diseases. Age at death has been postponed to higher age values in most developed countries since the post-World War II period. The global average life expectancy is about 72.5 years and in Japan it is almost 85 years old. The dramatic increase in the number of centenarians worldwide since the beginning of the 21st century is the most visible part of this phenomenon known as the "longevity revolution".

The increase in life expectancy raises the question of the quality of the life years gained. Epidemiological studies actually show that aging is accompanied by frailty, limitations, changes in perceived health and morbidity. Healthy life expectancy, calculated from information about health among old people and statistics of mortality, has become a major health indicator.

Longevity is expected to continue to increase, although improvement in survival tends to decline in very old age levels. In this context, policies to promote healthy ageing have become a priority for developed countries, as has the provision of long-term care for dependent people.